

Summary of Requirements for Special Dietary Accommodations in School Nutrition Programs

This document summarizes the requirements for meal accommodation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition programs. For more information on special diets, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Accommodating Special Dietary Needs in School Nutrition Programs](#).

Scenario	Determination of Disability	Plan on File	Examples of Medical Conditions ¹	Modification Required?	Required Documentation	What Medical Statement Must Include
Child has a disability that restricts their diet under Section 504	Section 504 meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 504 plan and Individualized Health Care Plan (IHCP) • May also have an Emergency Care Plan (ECP) depending on their medical condition 	Medical conditions that substantially limit a major life activity and affect the child's diet, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • metabolic diseases, such as diabetes or phenylketonuria (PKU) • food anaphylaxis (severe food allergy) 	Yes	Medical Statement for Children with Disabilities (signed by recognized medical authority ²)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's disability and an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet. • The major life activity affected by the disability. • The food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted.
Child has a disability that restricts their diet under IDEA	Planning and Placement Team (PPT) Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized Education Program (IEP) and IHCP • May also have an ECP depending on their medical condition 	Medical conditions that meet the IDEA recognized disability categories, require related services under IDEA and affect the child's diet, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traumatic brain injury • other health impairment, e.g., heart condition, diabetes 	Yes	Medical Statement for Children with Disabilities (signed by recognized medical authority ²)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's disability and an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet. • The major life activity affected by the disability. • The food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted.
Child has a disability that restricts their diet according to a licensed physician but not through Section 504 or IDEA	Recognized medical authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHCP • May also have an ECP depending on their medical condition 	Medical conditions that do not qualify for a disability under Section 504 or IDEA but that are determined by the child's physician to be severe enough to be considered a disability, e.g., celiac disease. <i>The USDA requires schools to make special dietary accommodations for children with celiac disease who participate in school nutrition programs.</i>	Yes	Medical Statement for Children with Disabilities (signed by recognized medical authority ²)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's disability and an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet. • The major life activity affected by the disability. • The food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted.

Summary of Requirements for Special Dietary Accommodations in School Nutrition Programs, continued

Scenario	Determination of Disability	Plan on File	Examples of Medical Conditions ¹	Modification Required?	Required Documentation	What Medical Statement Must Include
Child does not have a disability under Section 504, IDEA or according to a licensed physician, but has a medical condition that restricts their diet	Recognized medical authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHCP • May also have an ECP depending on their medical condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food allergy (not life threatening) • Food intolerances (except lactose intolerance) ³ • Celiac disease • Overweight (not morbidly obese) • High blood cholesterol 	No ⁴	Medical Statement for Children without Disabilities (signed by recognized medical authority ²) <i>This statement is required if the school chooses to make accommodations.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An identification of the medical or other special dietary need that restricts the child's diet. • The food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet and the food or choice of foods that may be substituted.
Personal Food Preferences	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	No ⁵	Not applicable	Not applicable
Vegetarianism	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	No ⁵	Not applicable	Not applicable
Religion	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	No ⁶	Not applicable	Not applicable

¹ These examples of medical conditions are not all-inclusive and may not require accommodations for all children. Some medical conditions may apply to more than one scenario.

² Recognized medical authorities include physicians, physician assistants, doctors of osteopathy and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). The medical statements are available on the CSDE's [Special Diets](#) Web page.

³ Schools can choose to provide lactose-free or lactose-reduced low-fat (1%) unflavored or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk without a medical statement. Schools can also choose to provide one or more nondairy milk substitutes (such as soy milk) that meet the USDA nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes. Nondairy milk substitutes require a written request from parents/guardians but they do not require a medical statement. The written request must indicate the medical or other special dietary need that restricts the child's diet. For more information, see [Allowable Milk Substitutions for Nondisabled Children in the USDA School Nutrition Programs](#).

⁴ USDA regulations do not require schools to make modifications for student without disabilities. However, schools can choose to make these accommodations on a case-by-case basis.

⁵ USDA regulations do not require schools to make modifications to meals based on food choices or the personal preferences of a family or child. However, schools may choose to accommodate these preferences by offering multiple meal choices and implementing offer versus serve (OVS). For more information, see the CSDE's [OVS](#) Web page.

⁶ The USDA allows meal pattern exemptions based on religion only for **entities** (schools, institutions and sponsors), not individuals. However, schools may choose to address individual needs by substituting different food items within the same component category of the USDA meal patterns, offering multiple meal choices and implementing OVS.



For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Special Diets](#) Web page or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

This handout is available at www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/sdn/spdiet_chart.pdf.

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